



QAA
Scotland

A large, light blue abstract graphic consisting of several overlapping circular and curved lines, resembling a stylized 'Q' or a series of concentric arcs, positioned on the left side of the page.

Enhancement-led institutional review

Edinburgh College of Art

MARCH 2009

A large, light blue abstract graphic consisting of a thick, curved line that starts from the left and curves downwards and to the right, ending in a pointed shape, positioned at the bottom of the page.

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2009

ISBN 978 1 84482 999 6

All QAA's publications are available on our website www.qaa.ac.uk

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Enhancement-led institutional review Edinburgh College of Art

Introduction

1 This is the report of an Enhancement-led institutional review (ELIR) of the Edinburgh College of Art (ECA or the College) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). QAA is grateful to the College for the willing cooperation provided to the ELIR team.

ELIR method and report

2 The ELIR method was revised during 2007-08 following extensive consultation with the Scottish higher education sector. Full detail on the method is set out in the *Enhancement-led institutional review handbook: Scotland (second edition) 2008*, which is available on QAA's website.

3 ELIR reports are structured around three main sections: the management of the student learning experience; institution-led monitoring and review of quality and academic standards; and the strategic approach to quality enhancement. Each of these three sections leads to a 'commentary' in which the views of the ELIR team are set out. The three commentaries, in turn, lead to the overarching judgement on the level of confidence that can be placed in the institution's management of academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience. A summary report is also available in printed form and from QAA's website.

Method of review

4 The College submitted a reflective analysis (RA), which provided the focus for the review. The RA was supported by a number of accompanying documents, including a case-study relating to developments in First Year Studies in Art and Design at the institution. The ELIR team also received the report of the College's previous ELIR, which took place in 2005.

5 Development of the RA was managed by an ad hoc ELIR Project Team, established in September 2008, and including in its membership the Student Representative Council President. Each school, academic centre and support department was invited to contribute to the RA. Key themes arising from the RA were presented to the Board of Governors in December 2008.

6 The ELIR team visited the College on two occasions: the Part 1 visit took place on 25 and 26 February 2009, and the Part 2 visit took place in the week beginning 30 March 2009.

7 The ELIR team comprised Ms Sara Jennett, Professor Kerri-Lee Krause, Ms Donna McMillan, Mr Ben Paton, Professor Andrew Walker and Professor Philip Winn. The review was managed on behalf of QAA by Ms Ailsa K L Crum, Assistant Director, QAA Scotland.

Background information about the institution

8 The College is an independent higher education institution, designated by the Scottish Funding Council as one of four small specialist institutions (SSIs) in the Scottish university sector. Since 2004, the College's degrees have been awarded by the University of Edinburgh and an Academic Federation Agreement, facilitating closer collaboration, has been in place between the two institutions since 2007. A validation agreement with Heriot-Watt University will end in 2012 with the graduation of the final students admitted under that arrangement. The College is working towards developing three academic areas in Art, Architecture, and Design. The Edinburgh School of Architecture, due to open in August 2009, is a joint venture with the University of Edinburgh. In 2008-09, the College has 1,632 full-time equivalent (FTE) students, of whom around 300 are postgraduates.

Institution's strategy for quality enhancement

9 The College described its approach to quality enhancement as proactive, reflective and responsive, and informed by a range of key reference points and evaluation mechanisms, including external and institution-led quality review; external examiners' reports; student feedback; the national enhancement themes; staff engagement in academic activities and memberships of subject and professional bodies; industry collaborations; and research in the discipline.

Management of the student learning experience

Key features of the student population and the effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing information about its student population

10 In 2008-09, the College had 1,632 FTE students with 48 per cent of the total student population coming from Scotland, 29 per cent from the rest of the United Kingdom (UK), 11 per cent from Europe and the remaining 12 per cent from outside Europe. In 2006-07, there were 259 FTE taught postgraduate students (of whom 94 were international) and 24 research students (of whom 14 were international). The majority of students study full-time. In 2008-09, 33 FTE students were registered part-time on two undergraduate Combined Studies programmes. In addition, there were 45 part-time postgraduates, of whom 19 were research students.

11 The College is not planning to increase its overall student numbers but, as a strategic priority, intends to make a gradual increase in the proportion of taught postgraduate students, with a small increase in international (outside Europe) students. In the next funding cycle, the College plans to introduce five-year integrated master's programmes in Art and Design, with the stated aim of encouraging more students to remain in Scotland for postgraduate study.

12 The Academic Registry is responsible for managing the student records system and works in partnership with the schools and centres to ensure the integrity of student-related data. The College considered that it has made significant progress in developing online systems to manage information on its student population, including implementing user-friendly interfaces to support the various elements of the student lifecycle; for example, online matriculation, and student access to assessment grades. The College has plans to carry out further work aimed at facilitating greater use of the centrally held student data, and is encouraged to progress this (see paragraph 54).

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to engaging and supporting students in their learning

Student representation and involvement

13 The 2005 ELIR report confirmed that the College had appropriate arrangements for student representation in place. The College indicated that it has continued to facilitate greater involvement of the student community in developing their learning, although it did acknowledge that student participation at the school and programme level may still vary. The College has pursued its work with the Student Representative Council (SRC) and the national service, Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs) to ensure that student representatives across the College receive training and support. The College and SRC have jointly developed a new student representative handbook and the Academic Registrar holds monthly meetings with the SRC President. Further staff and student training sessions were delivered by sparqs in January 2009, to support a revised role for the programme committees and to ensure student representatives could contribute effectively when providing feedback and comment to inform the annual programme monitoring and review process (see paragraph 49).

14 The current SRC president, who is a sparqs qualified trainer, has been very active in their role, in working to ensure that all student representatives are appropriately trained and encouraged to participate in College committees. The College is aware of the importance of ensuring the sustainability of active student leadership when the current President leaves office; the President has produced a range of documentation to promote a smooth transition.

15 Overall, it is clear the College has been working to promote the consistency of formal student representation and involvement across the institution. The College is aware that the main focus of its work has been on taught provision (see paragraph 31).

Gathering student views

16 In addition to formal representation, students have a range of opportunities for providing feedback on their views. There is a Principal's Committee, which is a joint management-student body to advise the Principal directly on student matters. Its membership includes the SRC President and 11 other student representatives. There is also a student forum that provides students with an opportunity to discuss SRC policies. The Principal's Committee and Student Forum meet each term, with the agenda being led by the students through the SRC President. In 2008-09, for the first time, the College conducted an institution-wide survey of student opinion, with the key questions based on the National Student Survey. The survey collected views from undergraduate and postgraduate (taught and research) students. At programme level, a variety of methods for gathering student feedback is in place including regular module questionnaires in some areas, meetings with programme leaders, one-to-one or group discussions, and informal coffee mornings. The College emphasised the importance of informal opportunities for students to provide feedback through day-to-day conversations with staff, describing this as a key benefit of being a small institution.

17 Students with experience of the Principal's Committee commented that it could be helpful, although they highlighted that its relationship with the Student Forum needed to be clarified. Many students identified changes that had been made at the programme level in response to student feedback, while some students believed that wider institutional issues remained unchanged. Students welcomed the College-wide survey, particularly appreciating that they were able to respond anonymously (see paragraph 54). Students were positive about the opportunities to meet with staff at the programme level, indicating that these helped to resolve immediate 'housekeeping' matters. Students were also positive about opportunities to participate in focus groups that are used in some parts of the College. The informal communication networks are a distinctive and positive feature of the institution, although there is little evidence of how information gained from these sources is systematically used to enhance the student experience. It is also unclear how students are made aware of the outcomes of the feedback they have provided, including any action taken. There would be benefit in the College considering the extent to which students across the institution have equivalent opportunities to provide feedback on their experience, while retaining all the best features of the existing informal communication and feedback networks. The College is encouraged to give particular consideration to the needs and experiences of students from diverse backgrounds (see also paragraph 41).

Approach to learning and teaching

18 The College emphasised the distinctive character of learning and teaching at ECA, reflecting the nature of art, architecture and design as iterative, practice-led activities. The College's approach places great importance on the one-to-one pedagogic relationship students have with staff; small-group discussions; and studio practice. In later levels of undergraduate study, students are responsible for directing their own learning and tutor-led projects are replaced by facilitated learning, with students determining their own lines of enquiry and study themes. The themes are formally approved by tutors, to ensure that the students will be able to meet the required learning outcomes.

19 The College also highlighted the extent to which students benefit from opportunities to learn from their peers, both those on other programmes and at other levels of study. In an effort to promote this, the College has designed or reconfigured a number of studios to facilitate students from different year groups working together. Students are enthusiastic about the opportunities for cross-year learning, which give them a sense of being part of a wider learning community. Students also appreciate the flexibility to pursue their own study themes, which allow them to experiment and use the wider facilities of the College (see paragraph 35).

20 The College is aware that the levels of tutorial support vary widely between different programmes and even between members of staff. Resulting from an institution-led review, the School of Architecture has introduced guidance to students on the minimum tutorial support they can expect. While it is recognised that students on different programmes are likely to have differing needs, there would be considerable benefit in making explicit the student entitlement to tutorial support in all parts of the College.

Centre for Visual and Cultural Studies

21 The Centre for Visual and Cultural Studies (CVCS) works alongside the academic schools, engaging with students to develop their critical and theoretical studies, to accompany their specialist focus. CVCS also offers a number of postgraduate taught programmes and research provision, for example in visual culture and in contemporary art. The College has emphasised its desire to integrate departments and this is exemplified by the inclusion of the Visual Culture strand, taught by CVCS, in each year of all art and design programmes. However, the College-wide student survey highlights that CVCS is regarded as a separate entity and students identify communication challenges between CVCS and their subject tutors. It is recognised that the College is committed to integrating the work of CVCS, and this should include effective communication among all staff, in particular to ensure students are not given conflicting information by different groups of staff.

First-year studies in Art and Design

22 From 2007-08, in a significant redesign of the early curriculum, first-year students in Art and Design have received tuition from senior staff within the academic schools from the beginning of their experience at the College. The College described the First Year Studies (Art and Design) development as the first major curriculum collaboration of its kind between the Schools of Design, Drawing and Painting, and Sculpture. It has the aim of enhancing the transition of students into higher education and informing students' choices regarding their future specialisms. The College has identified a wide range of benefits of the new curriculum including: staff teaching across all undergraduate levels and programmes; and facilitating the delivery of holistic projects. Students are enthusiastic about the revised curriculum, regarding it as a significant improvement on the previous arrangements. Students particularly appreciated being taught by senior members of staff with clear research specialisms, as well as enjoying the opportunity to meet staff and students in other years of study in the specialist departments. Subject staff highlighted the benefits of collaborating with other departments and schools in the delivery of the First Year Studies curriculum, a further advantage of which has been the greater integration of theory and practice. It is evident that the revision to the curriculum has been a positive development resulting in a significant enhancement of the student and staff experience (see paragraph 79).

Communication with students

23 In 2008-09, the College replaced its institution-wide student handbook with individual programme handbooks which are available on the intranet. It was intended that all the programme handbooks would follow the same three-part structure (comprising an introduction to the programme, programme-specific information, and standard College information).

However, there is wide variation between the handbooks' content and structures in practice, and not all handbooks contain the standard College information supplied by the Academic Registry. Information relating to academic misconduct is not included in the programme handbooks but is available in the Academic Regulations Handbook. Staff explained that this was to prevent potentially misleading information about academic misconduct being distributed and that CVCS has produced 'student-friendly' leaflets on the topic. While the College's caution about version control is recognised, material advising students about academic misconduct should be clearly signposted and accessible. The College should also introduce mechanisms for ensuring the consistency and accuracy of programme handbooks for the start of each academic year.

24 The College is in an extended transition phase between an electronic student portal (launched in 2005) and a more recent virtual learning environment (VLE). Senior staff commented that they wanted to allow time for the new VLE to establish itself before discontinuing the portal. Some staff, notably those in CVCS, are using the new VLE, while others are continuing with the portal, meaning that students have to access both the VLE and the portal to find module information. There is, unsurprisingly, confusion about where to find key material, including among a number of students who were unaware that programme materials were on both platforms. The College should make the transition to one authoritative online source as soon as possible.

25 Students raised a number of concerns about the use of email across the institution. There do not appear to be any controls regulating the College email system, resulting in a high volume of emails being sent and received. Students were concerned that they might miss important messages, because of the volume of email, indicating that many of their peers were disinclined to use their College email accounts. Staff have acknowledged problems with the system and should take prompt action to clarify how email communications between staff and students are to be implemented.

International exchanges

26 The College highlighted that it promotes international student exchanges as a valuable opportunity to the student community. There is a Student Exchange Officer, who meets annually with programme leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of the exchange agreements with the partner institutions. While on exchange, students can access their CVCS modules via the new VLE, which helps maintain links with College staff. The College emphasised that students must be performing consistently well academically to be considered for an exchange.

27 Responses to the College-wide student survey (see paragraph 17) indicated that students' experiences on exchange can vary, with many students, (notably those in Design and Applied Arts) reporting an excellent experience, while others considered that they could have had more support from the College. Some support staff considered a key benefit of the exchange was to encourage the students to become independent and, therefore, advocated a 'hands-off' approach to providing support. The College's annual review of exchange arrangements is good practice and there would be merit in extending the review to include formal monitoring of exchange students' expectations and experiences before, during and after the exchange period. It is understood that students maintain various forms of journal as part of their exchange study, which is also positive. The College is encouraged to develop its arrangements further by ensuring that the experiences of these students are more systematically monitored.

Assessment

28 The College has made significant changes to its assessment practice since the 2005 ELIR (see paragraph 64). The new assessment arrangements, which cover both undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision, were piloted in Architecture and Drawing and Painting in 2007-08 and implemented across the College in 2008-09. The College emphasised a number

of features of the new arrangements, including that students receive regular feedback on their progress which is related directly to the published learning outcomes; and students receive a minimum number of written tutorial feedback reviews per stage of study. To assist with developing students' understanding of their learning and, in particular, the assessment arrangements, students are encouraged to conduct self-assessments. This process is supported with a template, set out in the College Assessment Handbook, which mirrors the assessment sheet and explicit criteria used by staff. The College intends that, increasingly, comparison of the student's and staff assessments will form the basis of the student's critique or tutorial on progress and achievement.

29 Programme staff commented that the clarification of intended learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria had been helpful to staff, students and external examiners, in identifying exactly what was being assessed when considering students' work. Because the system was introduced fully for the first time in the current session, not all students had experienced receiving their assessment results in the revised format. Students indicated that the new arrangements had been explained either through module briefs or through small-group discussions with staff, and highlighted that they are able to access the Assessment Handbook online (see paragraph 64).

Research students

30 The College indicated that the Graduate Research School had been developed to cater specifically for the differing needs and facility requirements of research students. A full-time Director has been in post since 2007-08. The College emphasised that students now work with a minimum of two, and a maximum of three, supervisors who work in teams to facilitate the potential for critical dialogue in relation to the student's research. Although the research student population is small, it is a diverse group comprising a mix of full and part-time students; around half of the research student population comes from outside the UK and, of those students, the majority come from outside Europe.

31 Research students were included in the institution-wide student survey, but the College has acknowledged that the main focus of its work to promote student participation has been on taught provision. While research students are positive about their experience, there is a need for the College to introduce more explicit arrangements for monitoring and managing the research student experience, to ensure it is positive for all students. There would be benefit in ensuring that all students have a clear induction and, in particular, are familiar with their entitlement to access studio resources (see paragraphs 35).

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting the development of graduate attributes, including those relating to employability, in all of its students

32 The College Employability Service aims to support students and graduates with all aspects of their career management and in the development of skills, knowledge and experience that will help them in their chosen careers. The Service provides guidance, careers information and a programme of events. The College emphasised that, because self-employment is significantly higher in the creative industries than in other sectors, raising student awareness of enterprise and providing enterprise learning opportunities is particularly important. Scottish Funding Council (SFC) employability funding is being used to develop students' transferable skills and graduate attributes through a number of activities including developing personal and professional development planning (PPDP). To date, work has focused on First Year Studies (Art and Design), introducing professional practice into the curriculum, but the College intends for this to be developed progressively across all levels of study; 20-credit Professional Practice modules are integrated into all validated programmes in the College. However the College intends the model piloted in First Year Studies (Art and Design) to be used to embed professional practice further into each programme, with delivery by programme staff, in association with support services staff, as appropriate. Further staff development is planned to support this, which is encouraged.

33 Students are very aware of the range of graduate attributes and skills that they consider they are developing through their learning. The College's focus on employability has clearly been valuable in raising the profile of the Employability Service among students at all stages and, in general, students are positive about the information and support available from the Service. Overall, the College has made good progress with its employability initiatives, and is encouraged to continue the planned developments, to ensure that all schools and programmes are able to participate.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing the learning environment

34 In summer 2007, the College was able to consolidate its activities onto a single campus, reducing the estate from 11 to four buildings. The College highlighted a range of benefits associated with the implementation of its Estates Strategy, including the positive impact on the student and staff populations through relocating into a new building with facilities designed for purpose. The College emphasised that the majority of its full-time students are allocated personal studio space, which it recognises as costly but of significant importance to the education of artists, architects and designers. The College emphasised that the allocation of studio space is not an exact science and intends to explore different approaches as it develops its space allocation model, with the aim of ensuring that each specialism is appropriately supported with teaching accommodation and workshop infrastructure.

35 The College is enthusiastic about the opportunities its approach to learning and teaching provides for students to experience a breadth of subject specialisms, at the same time as having a deep immersion in their chosen specialist area (see paragraph 19). Students welcome this approach, considering it gives them a broader base with which to develop their ideas and, in some cases, experience of cross-disciplinary working. It does create additional demand for resources, which has to be managed. The College is aware of the resource allocation challenges and has introduced a primary and secondary-user model, whereby students who have opted to take a particular specialism have first access to the related resources, followed by students from other specialist areas. Students, particularly those in later years of study, indicated that access to resources was often achieved through informal arrangements. Students particularly appreciated their interactions with the studio and workshop technicians, who support students in developing skills. The College is encouraged to continue developing its approaches to prioritising studio space and other resources, to ensure this is carried out on a systematic and equitable basis. In particular, the College is encouraged to consider taught postgraduate students who enter from other institutions and, therefore, will be less familiar, initially, with the informal arrangements for accessing resources.

36 The two previous library collections were consolidated onto the single campus in early 2007. The new library forms a key element of the Learning Zone, which includes information technology (IT) services as well as learning and social spaces, and occupies three floors of a key new building, Evolution House. While the library's consolidation has generally been regarded as a success for all users, the College recognises that the opening hours remain limited, and this continues to be raised in student feedback. In particular, the College is aware that the library opening hours need to be addressed for master's students, especially given the planned move to a semester structure for 2009-10. The restricted hours also have a disproportionate impact on part-time students (see paragraph 40).

37 The College has expressed an intention to explore more flexible study options as part of a planned curriculum review during 2009-10. This potential change in the students' study patterns will have implications for the management of learning resources and the College is encouraged, as part of its review, to consider carefully the study patterns it will seek to promote and the implications for ensuring students can continue to access facilities.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to promoting equality of opportunity and effective learning for all of its students

38 The 2005 ELIR report identified student support arrangements as a positive feature at the College, highlighting the close links between Student Services and the SRC. The College emphasised that its Student Services estate has been refurbished to create a new student-facing resource centre, and a number of services have been extended. Students commented positively on the helpful role of the SRC as a signposting service, directing students to College support services where needed.

39 The College highlighted that, in line with other art and design institutions, a high proportion of its students have dyslexia. The College considered that it had made considerable progress in its arrangements for managing and disseminating information about students' needs to schools and centres, in order that reasonable adjustments can be made. In the case of dyslexia, preliminary diagnostic screening is available through Student Services and, for all students with disabilities, the Disability Adviser prepares an individual Learning Profile and coordinates a tracking arrangement to ensure that students receive appropriate support. Staff and students spoke highly of the support provided for students with disabilities.

40 The College has a small number of students studying on the part-time Combined Studies programme. Students are very positive about their tutors and emphasised the personal importance of having access to study at the College. However, these students are not linked to the specialist departments and have comparatively poor access to study space and other facilities. Senior staff acknowledged the anomalous position of the Combined Studies programme, indicating that it would be included within the planned curriculum review (see paragraph 37). The College is strongly encouraged to review the learning opportunities currently available to these students.

41 International and European Union students form a significant proportion of the total student population (see paragraph 10). In 2007, the College piloted an intensive 10-week summer induction programme, Art and Design in English Pre-sessional Training (ADEPT). ADEPT is now offered to all new international students whose first language is not English, but attendance is voluntary and not all students take up a place. Staff commented that continuing support for international students, such as language classes, was provided later in the year, with students encouraged to participate as the need arose. Feedback is positive from students who have attended the ADEPT programme, but other international students commented that their induction had been the same as that for UK-based entrants. Students also highlighted the importance of receiving support in adjusting to cultural differences, which is a key element of the ADEPT programme. Particularly in view of the College's intention to increase international student numbers, there would be benefit in the College ensuring there are adequate induction arrangements for all these students.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to supporting and developing staff to promote effective learning for their students

42 The College emphasised its view that staff should be supported to maintain their professional practice, research and wider subject knowledge, to ensure currency and relevance in their teaching. Staff are required to engage with the development opportunities provided by the College and this is monitored by Human Resources. Staff participate in annual career review meetings with their line managers through which individual and collective development needs can be identified. Human Resources identifies operational staff development needs through staff questionnaires to inform the design and range of activities provided during the timetabled development weeks for all staff. Schools and centres are also responsible for identifying development needs specific to their activities. A number of staff indicated that the annual career review discussions were helpful, although line managers noted the workload involved in reviewing the significant number of fractional posts.

43 Despite the range of mechanisms in place for identifying staff development needs, and a willingness on the part of Human Resources to respond to requests for development, there is evidence that the College is not proactive in providing development opportunities to support strategic or policy developments. A notable exception to this was the development and support which accompanied the revised assessment arrangements (see paragraph 28) including briefings for staff and students on the proposals and a series of sessions on writing learning outcomes. The College has recognised the need for ongoing professional development to support the revised assessment process, with an emphasis on sharing existing good practice, and this approach is strongly encouraged.

44 The College has identified a number of strategic developments such as the proposed integrated master's programmes, semesterisation, and a potential increase in flexible modes of delivery. It will be important for the College to anticipate the staff development needs associated with these planned activities, as well as adopting a more strategic and proactive approach to addressing existing needs, such as development in support of the employability project and the embedding of the new VLE platform. A number of key staff roles have been, or will be, created as a result of the planned reorganisation of the school structure (see paragraph 82). Given the pivotal role the staff undertaking these roles will play, the College is strongly encouraged to prioritise their development and support needs. The College has recognised the need to develop a coherent and strategic approach to staff development, in order to promote greater engagement with pedagogical and enhancement-led initiatives. It has also expressed its intention to align career review with the institution's quality enhancement priorities. There would be considerable merit in the College pursuing these intentions.

45 All new teaching staff are required to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Art, Design and Communication. The College indicated that a number of staff in key roles had successfully completed the qualification, and had contributed to staff development sessions, which is positive. In a further move to raise the profile of learning and teaching, the College indicated that its Academic Promotions Committee, supported by Human Resources, would develop criteria to ensure that appropriate recognition would be given to excellence and innovation in these areas. The College is encouraged to continue developing its approach to recognising and rewarding good practice in learning and teaching.

The effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience on collaborative programmes

46 As one result of the College's Academic Federation with the University of Edinburgh, the new jointly owned Edinburgh School of Architecture will open in August 2009. The College's School of Landscape Architecture will be included with the joint School in 2010. The College has recognised the challenge associated with providing integrated library and information technology services to students and staff of the new School, and intends to carry out a review of the accommodation and infrastructure.

47 Senior staff indicated that the College had made efforts to communicate the arrangements for establishing the joint School to staff and students. Nonetheless, there was some uncertainty about which architecture students would be included in the new School, and where architecture teaching would take place in 2009-10 for current students. There was an apparent disparity in the information provided by senior staff and discussions within the College's School of Architecture. The College should give priority to establishing clear and authoritative lines of communication between staff and students (both current and incoming).

Institution-led monitoring and review of quality and standards

Key features of institution-led monitoring and review at the institution, and the extent to which these arrangements meet sector-wide expectations

48 The College outlined key features of its approach to monitoring and review, including student participation on internal review panels; the inclusion of external subject specialists in programme review; and adherence with external expectations, in particular Scottish Funding Council (SFC) guidelines and the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education*, published by QAA. Four of the College's programmes are accredited by three professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), which involves regular critical appraisal of the provision.

49 The Annual Programme Monitoring and Review (APMR) process focuses on the consideration of matters arising from external examiner reports, statistical performance indicators, student feedback, and the outcomes from school academic boards and programme committees, and the resulting reports are submitted to the Academic Registry. In addition, APMR reports include examples of good practice and a short statement identifying action for the forthcoming year. When preparing and drafting the APMR prior to submission to the Academic Registry, schools and centres use a 'critical friend' (a member of staff selected from a different school or centre) as a form of support and staff development. The APMRs are discussed and monitored at programme level by the programme committees. Discussion in the programme committees provides students with an opportunity to see and comment on the APMR reports. The College holds an annual APMR institutional analysis meeting, led by the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Academic Registrar, at which heads of school and programme leaders deliver presentations and discuss the APMR outcomes with the explicit aim of sharing good practice. The College has identified that the process has been less successful in considering matters relating to student support, and intends to address this at the end of 2008-09. Further adjustments to APMR are planned with the aim of encouraging a more inclusive approach, focusing on reflection and evaluation. The arrangements for discussing APMR outcomes include a blend of formal and informal approaches and represent good practice, capitalising on the small scale of the institution.

50 The Internal Review of Academic Programmes (IRAP) arrangements operate on a five-year cycle overseen by the College Learning and Teaching Board. IRAP panel membership includes students, external subject specialists and representation from the University of Edinburgh. Previously, the IRAP process focused at the school level, but the College has indicated that future IRAPs will be undertaken at the programme level. A new IRAP cycle began in 2008-09 and the College intends to use the outcomes to monitor and evaluate the new academic and curricular structure, including the move to semesters. In 2006, the College adapted the IRAP method to conduct a review of Student Services, with the outcomes informing changes to the estate and staffing structure (see paragraph 34). The College intends to learn from the experience of the Student Services review in addressing the emphasis on support services contained within the revised SFC Guidance.

51 The Academic Registry has a key role in the management of the IRAP and APMR procedures, ensuring information is passed between schools and centres to the Learning and Teaching Board and on to the Academic Council. The Academic Registry also oversees the process of passing IRAP and APMR information to the University of Edinburgh.

52 The 2005 ELIR report stated that the College's APMR and IRAP processes were effective and had the strong support of staff. Evidence from the current ELIR indicates that this continues to be the case.

The extent to which the institution's monitoring and review arrangements include consideration of all students

53 The APMR process provides a key avenue for considering the student experience, and for involving students in the evaluative process through discussions in the programme committees. The Postgraduate Studies Committee has responsibility for monitoring the academic standards of research degrees but its constitution does not include any explicit reference to monitoring the postgraduate student experience. The College has indicated that it is continuing to develop the supporting infrastructure for research students through its Graduate Research School, but the School does not participate in APMR which currently only applies to taught provision. It is important for the College to ensure that postgraduate research students are involved in formal monitoring and review arrangements to ensure that issues relating to the quality of their experience are recognised and addressed. There would also be benefit in clarifying the interrelationship between the Graduate Research School and the Postgraduate Studies Committee.

54 All taught programmes, including part-time and taught postgraduate awards, are included in the IRAP and APMR processes. The outcomes of these are analysed at school and programme level. The College does not currently give explicit consideration in these processes, or in its various arrangements for gathering student feedback (see paragraph 17) to students from different demographic groups or those in different study modes. While the majority of students are full-time, there are part-time postgraduates; the Combined Studies undergraduate programme is specifically designed to attract part-time students, and the College intends to explore the potential for developing more flexible modes of study. Other significant groups include international students who already represent a substantial proportion of the student population, and those from widening participation backgrounds. The College has indicated that it is working to encourage applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds but it is unclear how the experience of these students is evaluated. The College is encouraged to give more explicit consideration to its key student groups in its monitoring and review arrangements, and in its analysis of data (see paragraph 62).

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to self-evaluation including the use made of external reference points

55 The College stated that self-evaluation has become an integral part of the procedures which define how the institution functions. Evaluation relating to the APMR and IRAP processes takes place in schools and at institutional level through a number of committees, many of which have been newly created or reviewed.

56 The College indicated that the Learning and Teaching Board advises the Academic Council on the formation of policies, strategies and procedures relating to academic standards and the student experience. It receives reports from the programme committees, school boards and the Academic Planning Group. As yet, there is limited evidence of information resulting from the Learning and Teaching Board's decisions flowing back to the school boards and programme committees.

57 The Academic Planning Group (APG) is led by the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching) and includes heads, associate heads, programme leaders and the Academic Registrar who meet weekly to exchange information and ideas. It has acted as a significant cross-College forum for discussing a wide variety of learning and teaching issues and related matters, such as the First Year Studies curriculum and the resource allocation model. Although APG was established relatively recently, it clearly offers a useful mechanism for self-evaluation, combining a formal role with informal approaches. The College might consider the sustainability of a weekly forum of this sort, although it has clearly been of significant value to date. There would also be benefit in the College considering the role APG could play in determining strategic priorities (see paragraph 59).

58 The Strategic Planning Group was established in October 2008 and meets monthly, chaired by the Principal. It includes the College Executive and the heads of school and support departments. It has discussed matters of strategic significance, such as the Research Assessment Exercise, and overseas recruitment, but does not yet appear to have had a key role in setting institutional priorities for learning and teaching.

59 Overall, there is clear evidence of significant positive change at the College that is indicative of a strong commitment to self-review and enhancement; examples include the developments in the estate, the revised approach to learning and teaching, the developments in assessment and the new school structure (see paragraph 82). These indicate that the College is able to identify its development needs. However, the College should consider its mechanisms for setting explicit strategic priorities in learning, teaching and assessment. It is not clear that the Strategic Planning Group is doing this and, although well-placed to do so, APG does not currently fulfil this role. Having set strategic priorities, there is also a need to monitor progress and evaluate the outcomes. Furthermore, the College should ensure that decisions are clearly recorded. The Academic Registry has undertaken some positive work in standardising committee minutes, but this should be developed further to ensure that responsibility for undertaking follow-up action is always clear and can be tracked. Given the extent of change, including to the institution's deliberative structures, there would be considerable benefit in the College also undertaking a holistic review of the overall effectiveness of its structures (see paragraph 76).

60 The College indicated that the primary external reference points used in its self-evaluation are aligned to the Academic Infrastructure published by QAA. The College does not make extensive explicit reference to the Academic Infrastructure in its regular monitoring and review activities, but there is clear evidence of careful attention being paid to external examiner reports and professional body accreditation. The College considered that the external activities of its staff have been of significant benefit in facilitating comparison of the institution with its peers. It does not currently have a formal process for maximising these benefits, but was considering using APG as a forum for sharing good practice resulting from external activity; this would be a positive development (see paragraph 82).

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to the management of information to inform the operation and evaluation of its monitoring and review activity

61 The Academic Registry acts as a hub for the collection, management and dissemination of institutional data. Many of the systems for gathering, managing and reporting information are new and the College is conscious that it has not yet been able to test their effectiveness. The College has, however, stated that it has been striving for consistency since the 2005 ELIR and considers that it has experienced significant benefits associated with preparing information in a common format. The Academic Registry and academic staff indicate that there is now a closer alignment and a greater sense of shared ownership of information between the Academic Registry and schools. This is a positive development which should provide a secure foundation for the future use of institutional data sets to assure and enhance the student experience.

62 The Academic Registry prepares a number of themed reports on the basis of the analysis of data, such as those emerging from the APMR and IRAP processes and the outcomes of the college-wide student survey. At present, it appears that these reports are prepared particularly for the Assistant Principal (Learning and Teaching), and there is an intention to submit them to the Learning and Teaching Board, but this had not yet taken place. While such reports are likely to be useful in synthesising key themes, they had been prepared very recently and it is not clear how the information will be used to inform the College's operations over a sustained period of time. Moreover, it is unclear how such information is intended to flow through the committee structure to inform strategic planning and policy setting, or to enhance the student experience. There is a similar lack of clarity surrounding the manner in which data prepared for external reporting purposes is used to inform the College's operations. The College is strongly encouraged

to ensure that there is clarity, rigour and clear accountability in its management of information to inform all levels of institutional operation.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to setting and maintaining academic standards including the management of assessment

63 The College has dual validation arrangements in place resulting from the strategic decision to change validating partner from Heriot-Watt University to the University of Edinburgh. Validation by Heriot-Watt will cease in 2012, following the graduation of research and Combined Studies students who are registered under that agreement. The 2005 ELIR report stated that the process of transition from one validating partner to another had been managed carefully by the College. The reporting arrangements to the validating universities continue to be secure.

64 Since the 2005 ELIR, the College has made significant progress in improving its arrangements for articulating academic standards and managing assessment, including documenting and applying learning outcomes, and aligning learning outcomes with assessment. Definitive programme documents and module descriptors are important tools in documenting and communicating assessment information to students. Staff indicated that the College Assessment Handbook has facilitated the development of a common language in relation to assessment across the institution. The new approach has been accompanied by staff development with plans for ongoing development identified (see paragraph 43). The College is encouraged to ensure it has mechanisms in place to review and update its key programme and institutional documents for setting out the assessment arrangements. It is also encouraged to monitor the effectiveness and impact of its revised arrangements on the assessment practices of staff and students across the College.

65 The College has plans in two areas that, while potentially positive, are likely to impact upon its approach to managing academic standards. The first is the introduction of a five-year integrated master's programme. This will have significant implications for curricular design, including academic standards setting, and assessment. It represents a qualitatively different mode of delivery, and is expected to contribute to the College having an increased proportion of postgraduate students. It will be important for the College to ensure that its strategic and operational planning explicitly recognises the implications for assessment in particular, and securing academic standards more generally, particularly if the College plans to pursue flexible modes of delivery and attendance. The second development is semesterisation. The College should be vigilant in anticipating possible implications for undergraduate and postgraduate curricular design and assessment practices. In particular, current assessment practices, such as formative feedback and the volume of assessment tasks may need to be reviewed as part of the change in the academic year. Staff development in support of these changes would be valuable (see paragraphs 43 and 44).

66 Overall, the College has a sound set of arrangements in place for setting and maintaining academic standards.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to managing public information about quality and academic standards, including the linkage with the institution's monitoring and review arrangements

67 The College stated that, at institutional level, the focus for publishing information on the quality of provision was its prospectus and website. Since the 2005 ELIR, the College has introduced a formal development and approval route map for producing the prospectus. The College website was under review at the time of the current ELIR with the aim of expanding its content and ensuring a more user-friendly format. The College has an information and digital technologies strategy that indicates responsibility for each part of the website will be devolved to the lowest appropriate level, with each department keeping their sections up to date. The

College intends to provide training in using the content management system, which is encouraged. The College should put formal arrangements in place to ensure that the different elements of its website will be consistent and accurate.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to linking its monitoring and review processes to its enhancement arrangements

68 There are examples of the College using both its APMR and IRAP processes to enhance the student experience. For example, the key changes to the First Year Studies (Art and Design) curriculum originated from the College's response to a 2007 IRAP (see paragraph 22). The APMR process includes a one-day session devoted to sharing good practice and lessons learned across the institution (see paragraph 49). These are positive features of the College's activity that are acknowledged and supported. On the other hand, the College is not yet capitalising on the information generated through its monitoring and review arrangements to bring about a more systematic link between assurance and enhancement (see paragraph 81).

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to monitoring and reviewing its collaborative activity

69 The College stated that it does not currently have formal collaborative arrangements resulting in awards. Students of the new School of Architecture, (see paragraph 46), will be jointly matriculated at the College and the University of Edinburgh. Although students will receive a jointly badged degree, the degree awarding institution is the University.

Strategic approach to quality enhancement

Key features of the institution's strategic approach to quality enhancement

70 The College emphasised its long-standing commitment to student-centred learning and continually improving the learning experience. The Strategic Plan 2007-10 includes a specific action to enhance the students' learning experience, to be achieved in part by refining the Learning and Teaching Strategy. The College has acknowledged that the scope of its existing Learning, Teaching and Quality Enhancement Strategy (2003) is limited and it has been under review since the 2005 ELIR. The College confirmed that it is now working towards establishing an integrated academic strategy, with the aim of ensuring that learning, teaching and research will have a collective focus. Senior staff indicated that the development of the integrated academic strategy would be informed by the outcomes of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise and the current ELIR.

71 Although there is no specific document setting out the current quality enhancement strategy, the College identified elements of a strategic approach in its preparations for the current ELIR. The College stated that its strategic approach for developing a culture of quality enhancement has two strands. Firstly, to develop effective quality assurance processes that provide the opportunity to identify and evaluate areas for enhancement and sharing of good practice. Secondly, to build an infrastructure for promoting enhancement in learning and teaching through which academic staff are supported in developing their subject knowledge and expertise to the benefit of the students. These strands will be important elements in promoting enhancement, but there must also be a clearly articulated strategic approach at institutional level, in order to devise and prioritise the enhancement objectives, and to plan their implementation.

72 In addition to the development of its integrated academic strategy, the College described the key features of its strategic approach to quality enhancement in terms of a wide range of processes and activities, including academic governance and management, components of quality assurance processes, staff development, research-teaching links, and engagement with the higher education sector. These key features can all be considered part of the infrastructure supporting the development of a quality enhancement culture. However, greater clarity would be brought to the

College's strategic approach if the development of a quality enhancement culture were itself one part of the integrated academic strategy. In this way, the integrated academic strategy would occupy a pivotal position between the College's Strategic Plan and the strategies for quality enhancement developed by the individual schools. This would give staff a clear view of institutional priorities and of how the school strategies related to those priorities (see paragraph 74).

The effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategies and policies for promoting quality enhancement across the institution

73 Since 2002, the College has undergone a period of academic and organisational restructuring and estates reconfiguration. The College aims to reduce the number of its academic units to three schools by August 2009, although the Graduate Research School will continue to operate separately. At the same time, the College has clarified staff roles and responsibilities, and has introduced the new role of Associate Head of School to take responsibility for cross-school and cross-College initiatives. The College intends that these changes in academic structure will enhance the learning experience by increasing the opportunities for student mobility across the current specialisms; enabling the heads of school to focus on strategic developments within their schools, including coherent enhancement strategies for teaching and research; and providing greater consistency of practice in the implementation of the College's assessment and quality assurance procedures. At the same time, a resource allocation model is being developed to ensure parity of experience for students and parity of workload for staff. Staff spoke positively about the changes, recognising the benefits of the new school structures. Associate head of school posts have not yet been established in all schools, but early indications are that staff view the development favourably in terms of school management and the personal development of the postholders.

74 School academic boards were established in 2008-09 to manage strategic and development objectives. Although it is too early to evaluate their effectiveness overall, the exemplar agenda template (produced for the boards), includes a number of explicit strategic items. As an example, the first meeting of the Academic Board for the School of Design noted the intention to develop a learning and teaching strategy for the School and to take a more strategic approach to staff development. This is encouraging, but it does highlight the potential for a lack of institutional cohesiveness if individual schools develop strategies without reference to an overarching College strategy. Some staff have identified gaps in institutional strategy and difficulties in tracking decision-making across institutional committees.

75 The Learning and Teaching Board (LTB) has a remit to advise the Academic Council on measures to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and to approve policy and procedures relating to quality assurance and enhancement. However, this has not formed a significant element of LTB business as yet. The Strategic Planning Group (see paragraph 56) is clearly in a position to act on strategic objectives set by the College Executive Group but, so far, it has not considered specific enhancement initiatives. However, it has resolved to focus on enhancement, research and academic strategy after the current ELIR.

76 As an advisory committee to the Principal, the Strategic Planning Group operates in parallel to the LTB without a direct reporting link, although the overlapping membership is likely to assist with information sharing. The Academic Planning Group also acts as a channel of communication, in that summary reports of its activities are presented to the LTB, and both the Executive Group and LTB can seek the Academic Planning Group's views and advice. In addition, the College indicated that the Academic Registry has a role in the production and monitoring of quality enhancement priorities. Overall, the formation and flow of information about strategic enhancement priorities from institutional level to school academic boards and programme committees does not appear to be straightforward. The College has recognised the need to review the committee structure to clarify the establishment, implementation and monitoring of enhancement priorities, and this is strongly supported.

77 Since the 2005 ELIR, as part of a major curricular review, the College has reviewed, re-described and revalidated its undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, and introduced standardised programme documentation and a new assessment scheme. The quality enhancement potential of this fundamental change, through the more explicit definition of the academic standards of awards, is considerable. There are many examples of effective implementation, such as the new assessment scheme that was piloted in two schools before being extended to the whole College; and the reform of the First Year Studies (Art and Design) curriculum that was coordinated by a specific planning group, which capitalised on the concurrent changes to the estate and the revised school structure, and was also informed by the outcomes of a number of the national Enhancement Themes. The College noted that, although the changes resulting from curriculum review are relatively new and the evaluation of their effects on quality enhancement is at an early stage, APMR and external examiner reports suggest that the changes are proving beneficial for students and staff.

The effectiveness of the institution's use of external reference points in its approach to quality enhancement, including the extent to which the institution's approach is informed by national and international practice

78 The 2005 ELIR report noted that the College had identified consistency of practice as a guiding principle in managing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Since then, this striving for consistency has underpinned much of the strategic enhancement activity that has taken place at the College, and the Academic Infrastructure has been used as a central reference point in the reviews of policies and procedures. Academic staff and students are positive about the greater consistency of practice, referring for example to the benefits of a learning outcomes approach to assessment in the creative disciplines and to the improved parity of experience resulting from standardised programme documentation.

79 The College highlighted the value of the national Enhancement Themes in the development of its enhancement priorities. For example, the outcomes of key themes informed the review of First Year Studies (Art and Design), the development of the new assessment scheme and the curriculum review. Among the enhancements of the learning experience expected to result from the new First Year Studies (Art and Design) curriculum is the early development of skills of critical analysis of visual culture and of the ability to articulate complex ideas clearly. There is an obvious link to the national Enhancement Theme 'Research-Teaching Linkages: enhancing graduate attributes', which the College is exploring in its development of the planned Integrated Academic Strategy (see paragraph 70).

80 The College has identified a range of external activities through which its staff contribute to the higher education environment generally and to the creative sector in particular. The College considers that it has accumulated considerable experience through its staff acting as external examiners, reviewers, and consultants, and through staff memberships of committees and other networks, UK-based and beyond. The College also emphasised its active encouragement for staff to participate in European and international exchanges. While the College considers these activities are of considerable benefit, it acknowledges that their impact on quality enhancement is difficult to quantify. The College also considers that it could make more effective use of its extensive European and international networks to inform curriculum structure, content and pedagogical approaches as well as benchmarking against international standards. It is therefore intended that heads of school will be required to formally identify appropriate national and international reference points to inform new developments and enhancements. To facilitate this, the Academic Registry has asked schools to submit a schedule of staff external engagements. A possible role is also being considered for the Academic Planning Group in sharing good practice. The College is encouraged to progress these initiatives in order to maximise the benefit of its extensive range of external activities.

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to identifying, disseminating and implementing good practice in the context of its strategic approach to enhancement

81 The operation of the Annual Programme Monitoring and Review (APMR) process provides opportunities for identifying and sharing good practice (see paragraph 68). Currently APMR is more effective at identifying good practice than in disseminating it. Feedback from the 2007-08 APMR presentations proposed the establishment of a web-based institutional database to facilitate this, which is likely to be a useful development. The IRAP process also has the potential to contribute to the sharing of good practice through the involvement of staff on IRAP panels and as invited observers. The College has recognised the current limitations in its approach to disseminating good practice across the institution.

82 Two recent developments are likely to have a positive impact. First, academic restructuring has resulted in clearly defined responsibilities for individuals within school management teams. Associate heads of school will, in different ways, be responsible for driving, managing and implementing strategic priorities and will develop expertise in particular areas, and this is likely to facilitate their identification and dissemination of good practice. The new school academic boards are also intended to be forums at which identified good practice can be disseminated. Secondly, the Strategic Planning Group and the Academic Planning Group are potential forums for sharing good practice at institutional level. The College identified that the Academic Planning Group was responsible for much of the development work for the new assessment arrangements and, as a result of this, associate heads of school and programme leaders held dissemination workshops about the new initiatives with groups of staff and students. A Rough Guide to Assessment was produced by the Associate Head of School and Programme Leader for Design and Applied Arts, and used across the College for staff development. Overall, the College has identified effective structures for disseminating good practice in the context of its strategic approach to enhancement (see paragraph 68).

The effectiveness of the institution's approach to enhancing collaborative provision

83 The College's most significant collaboration is formally enshrined in its Academic Federation Agreement (2007) with the University of Edinburgh. A joint School of Architecture is being established, which will give students access to the resources and facilities of both institutions with the intention of providing enhanced learning opportunities. The College has plans, which require substantial estates investment, to capitalise on the Federation Agreement through further joint developments with the University's School of Arts, Culture and the Environment in the areas of music, history of art, digital media, film and media arts. In addition to this major strategic partnership, the College is keen to enhance its research and teaching provision through developing 'clusters of excellence' involving networks of education and industry partners.

84 The College also has a range of international connections in Europe and beyond, established as a result of strategic planning and through individual initiatives, which are of benefit both for research activities and for staff and student exchanges. The enhancement potential of these collaborative activities has not been evaluated, but there is an implicit understanding that they have a beneficial effect on the learning experience.

Conclusion

Effectiveness of the institution's management of the student learning experience

85 The College has a distinctive approach to learning and teaching, aimed at reflecting the nature of art, architecture and design as iterative, practice-led activities. Students generally express high levels of satisfaction with their experience and have welcomed a number of recent developments, including changes to the first-year curriculum in Art and Design. Students are enthusiastic about the opportunities for learning in mixed study groups and the flexibility to

pursue their own study themes, enabling them to experiment and use the wider facilities of the College. A number of these developments have been facilitated by the estates strategy that has had a positive impact on the learning environment. The College has recognised that its approach presents particular challenges for resource allocation and is encouraged to continue developing its arrangements for prioritising studio space and other resources. There is a need for the College to introduce more explicit arrangements for monitoring and managing the research student experience, including ensuring that all students are familiar with their entitlement to access resources. There is an intention to develop more flexible study options and the College is encouraged to give careful consideration to the implications for ensuring that students can continue to access facilities and other learning resources. The College should review the learning opportunities available to students studying on the part-time Combined Studies programme who are not currently linked to the specialist departments.

86 Students are very aware of the range of graduate attributes and skills which they are developing. The College has made good progress in this area and is encouraged to continue with the planned developments to ensure that all schools and programmes are able to participate in the employability project. Opportunities for international student exchanges are actively promoted and the College carries out an annual review of its exchange partnerships, which represents good practice. There would be benefit in further developing the support available to students before, during and after their exchange visits.

87 Work has been undertaken jointly with the Student Representative Council to promote consistency in formal student representation, including staff and student training to support engagement at the programme level. A wide variety of formal and informal mechanisms is in place for gathering student views. There would be benefit in the College considering the extent to which students have equivalent opportunities to provide feedback, while retaining all the best features of the existing informal communication and feedback networks. The College is encouraged to make more systematic use of the outcomes of the student feedback it gathers, and to give particular consideration to the needs and experiences of students from diverse backgrounds, including international students. The College is also asked to review its communication mechanisms to ensure that students have access to a single online source for materials and that all students receive information on key matters, such as the policies on academic misconduct. Prompt action should be taken to clarify how email communications with students are to be implemented, and the College should also ensure that students do not receive conflicting information from different groups of staff. Related to the establishment of the new joint School of Architecture, there is a need to establish clear and authoritative lines of communication between staff and students, in particular to clarify the location of teaching and access to resources.

88 The College has recognised the need to develop a coherent and strategic approach to staff development in order to promote greater engagement with pedagogical and enhancement-led initiatives. Changes in the arrangements for managing assessment have been accompanied by a variety of development and briefing activities, and the College has recognised the need for ongoing professional development in this area, with the emphasis on sharing existing good practice. This approach is strongly encouraged. There would also be benefit in the College developing its approach to recognising and rewarding good practice in learning and teaching.

Effectiveness of the institution's arrangements for institution-led monitoring and review of quality, and academic standards of awards

89 The College has systematic processes in place to assure quality and secure academic standards, notably through its annual programme monitoring and review (APMR) and Internal Review of Academic Programmes (IRAP) processes, which are widely understood and adopted by staff. While both processes have included consideration of support service activity, further adjustments are planned to incorporate a more powerful evaluation of the contribution made by the support services, and this is encouraged. The College would benefit from more systematic

use of data relating to student feedback within and arising from its monitoring and review processes. Analysis of this information would help support the decision-making processes. The APMR process includes taught postgraduate, but not research, activity and there is a need to ensure systematic arrangements are put in place to monitor and review the research student experience.

90 Significant improvements have been made in the arrangements for articulating academic standards and managing assessment. The College is encouraged to continue embedding the revised arrangements, and to evaluate their impact on assessment practices across the institution.

91 A combination of formal and informal arrangements are in place and the College has worked to achieve a positive balance between these approaches to fit the institutional culture and scale; staff across the institution have been engaged through mechanisms such as the Academic Planning Group. The committee structure is recent, but already the College has acknowledged the need to make adjustments and there would be considerable benefit in reviewing the location of responsibility for priority setting in relation to learning and teaching. Associated with this, there is a need to consider the flows of information through the committee structure; the College should ensure that there is clarity, rigour and clear accountability in its management of information to inform all levels of institutional activity. In relation to public information, the College is reviewing its website and intends that responsibility for updating content will be devolved. While there are benefits in a devolved approach, this should be accompanied by formal arrangements to ensure the accuracy and consistency of published material.

92 There is a strong commitment to self-evaluation and enhancement as evidenced by the range of significant positive change at the College. There would now be considerable benefit in the College undertaking a holistic review of the overall effectiveness of its deliberative structures and the set of changes it has made.

Effectiveness of the institution's implementation of its strategic approach to quality enhancement

93 In recent years, the College has implemented a number of significant strategic developments and, in doing so, has demonstrated a deliberate commitment to quality enhancement. There is now a need to articulate a clear strategic approach to quality enhancement, linked to the Strategic Plan, in order to clarify institutional priorities and provide a focus for the schools and centres in forming their own strategies. The College is developing an Integrated Academic Strategy with the aim of ensuring that learning, teaching and research will have a collective focus. The College is strongly encouraged to progress this in order to provide an explicit understanding of the overarching strategic approach, and to assist institutional planning and prioritisation. The College has recognised the need to review the locus of quality enhancement in its committee structure, and this is strongly supported to clarify the flow of information and the responsibilities for setting, implementing and evaluating enhancement priorities.

94 The College has engaged productively with the national enhancement themes, using the outcomes of appropriate themes to inform strategic developments. Through institutional arrangements and individual staff initiatives, an extensive range of external contacts has been established. The College is encouraged to pursue its intention of maximising the opportunities for enhancing its practices by introducing more explicit mechanisms for drawing on these external links. The Academic Infrastructure has informed long-standing work aimed at promoting consistency of practice across a range of the College's processes and procedures. This increased consistency has facilitated the dissemination of good practice and the opportunities for sharing good practice are expected to be increased as a result of the planned changes in the school structure with the clear identification of staff roles in the new school management teams. The College is enthusiastic in identifying opportunities to capitalise on its formal collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, and is developing clusters of excellence with other institutions and agencies, with the aim of enhancing the student and staff experience.

Overarching confidence judgement

95 The findings of the ELIR indicate that there can be **confidence** in the College's current, and likely future, management of the academic standards of the awards it offers and the quality of the student learning experience it provides.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

QAA Scotland
183 St Vincent Street
Glasgow
G2 5QD

Tel 0141 572 3420
Fax 0141 572 3421
www.qaa.ac.uk

RG 519a 07/09